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ABSTRACT

Building effective school-to-work systems requires evaluation, usually incorporating both process and outcome evaluations. Increasingly, school-to-work systems are conducting self-evaluations or hiring evaluation teams to determine how effectively the system is designed and implemented and whether it is achieving its purposes for students and the community. Favorable evaluation results can be used for marketing the school-to-work system. Designing an evaluation of a school-to-work system requires the following steps: (1) identify stakeholders; (2) define the evaluation's purposes; (3) clarify goals and objectives; (4) determine evaluation roles and hire an evaluator; (5) write measurable evaluation questions; (6) choose evaluation methods; and (7) design recordkeeping procedures. Examples of effective practices of evaluation of school-to-work programs have been identified in Oregon State's Youth Transition Program and the Milwaukee Public School System. (Contains 10 references and an annotated list of 13 organizations are included in the report. A one-page fact sheet describes funding of the school-to-work system.) (KC)

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SCHOOL TO WORK OPPORTUNITIES

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★RESOURCE BULLETIN

APRIL 1996

Evaluation for School-to-Work Systems Improvement

The foundation of continual systems improvement is evaluation, a basic management tool integral to the cycle of system design, implementation, and improvement. At its best, evaluation offers compass readings that enable the managers of a system to navigate, continually adjusting course towards their basic objectives. Some evaluations assess how well or how poorly systems operate (*process* or *formative* evaluations). Other evaluations examine how effectively systems achieve their intended results (*outcome, summative*, or *impact* evaluations).

The well-designed evaluation builds into the management cycle the capacity for self-reflection and improvement. Just as individuals reflect upon and learn from their experiences, systems that rely on evaluation as a management tool incorporate the lessons of experience into subsequent planning. This approach views evaluation neither as an ad hoc nor as a one-time- only undertaking, but as a step in the management cycle.

Building effective school-to-work systems is precisely the kind of complex systemic change that cannot be accomplished without evaluation. Increasingly, school-to-work systems are conducting self-evaluations or hiring evaluation teams. Evaluations of complex systems, such as the school-to-work system, usually incorporate both process and outcome evaluations. Process evaluations of school-to-work examine issues related to the design and implementation of the system's model. Outcome evaluations look at how effectively the system is achieving its purposes, both for students and for the local schools, employers, and community. It enables management ultimately to assess the impact of the system on their students, specifically how their students perform in school and mature developmentally, and how their graduates fare in the worlds of work and postsecondary education.

Marketing is a secondary but important use of the information generated by evaluation. Studies that demonstrate a system's effectiveness in achieving results help justify the system and increase its visibility with the public and important constituencies--policy makers, employers, parents, funders, students, school boards, administrators, and teachers--persuading them to support the work underway, even leveraging additional resources. Evidence of effectiveness also has internal value in that it affirms for the system's leadership and staff the importance of their work.

Designing an evaluation of a school-to-work system requires a series of steps:

Identify Stakeholders. The first step in designing an evaluation is to assemble an evaluation

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team consisting of representatives of the primary stakeholders in the school-to-work system--including managers, instructors, partners, students, and funders--as well as the staff members with immediate responsibility for seeing that an evaluation is conducted. The team's knowledge of the system contributes in crucial ways to the design of the evaluation and the framing of questions. Involving stakeholders from the beginning engages them in the evaluation process, a step likely to improve their understanding and their ownership of its findings, increasing their willingness to act upon them. Their involvement also helps evaluators gain access to people and other information sources.

Define the Evaluation's Purposes. The evaluation team next discusses and defines the evaluation's purposes. Is it to examine process or impact or both? They identify the primary consumers of the information to be gathered through the assessment, and the decisions to be made on the basis of that information. Answers to these questions about overall purpose, as well as the system's clarified goals and objectives, shape the evaluation design.

Clarify Goals and Objectives. The next step in conducting an evaluation is to clarify goals and objectives. Goals are abstract, idealized statements of desired outcomes. Objectives are these goals restated in operational form, spelling out in detail one or more measurable criteria for success. The well-stated objective is specific, relevant, measurable, and attainable. Goals and objectives provide the standard for assessing the effectiveness of the system and its impact.

Determine Evaluation Roles and Hire an Evaluator. Whether to hire an internal or external evaluator depends on several factors, including cost, evaluation expertise, commitment, accessibility, and bias. An internal evaluator may bring a deep commitment to and understanding of the system, but may also be less objective and more resistant to recommendations for change. Expertise may also be an issue, since few organizations have evaluation specialists on staff.

The most complex, sophisticated evaluation studies--besides costing more in time and money--do not necessarily produce the most useful findings, however. And simpler evaluation methods do not require experts. Managers of school-to-work systems may wish to conduct some evaluations using their own staff and to hire outside experts for specific, more difficult evaluation tasks.

Write Measurable Evaluation Questions. The evaluation team should brainstorm the questions to which they would like answers. The team should narrow these down by eliminating those that cannot be answered by available or obtainable data. The final list of questions should be cast into concrete, observable, measurable terms.

Choose Evaluation Methods. The team selects appropriate evaluation methods through a process that considers the questions to which answers are sought, the information sought, the best information sources, access to those sources, reliability of sources, and costs. Data collection often can be incorporated into regular management processes.

Design Record-keeping Procedures. System staff may design record-keeping procedures on the system's implementation as part of its management structure. Such procedures include periodic benchmarks for the collection and analysis of information drawn from system records as well as focus groups and interviews with key staff and participants. (Records include the proposal, mission statement, objectives, system description, curriculum, staff development materials, staffing structure, minutes of

key meetings, student application and enrollment forms, and public relations and news coverage.) Staff should create a management information system to track the experiences of students throughout their tenure in the system, including numbers and categories of students, retention and completion rates, and changes over time in their use of the system.

Effective Practices

Oregon State's Youth Transition Program has carried out comprehensive evaluations to document the impact of the school-to-work system on specific student outcomes and systems change. Data are collected from each of the system's local sites on a variety of demographic and programmatic factors, over two-year follow-up periods, and analyzed in several ways. First, outcome data are analyzed relative to the outcomes of comparison groups, including statewide samples of students who leave school and students not served by the system, and a nationwide sample from the National Longitudinal Transition Study. Second, the evaluators examine student outcomes separately for (a) rural versus nonrural participants, and (b) students identified as at risk versus those not considered at risk. The evaluations determined that participants consistently fare better than nonparticipants in terms of wages, employment, and productive engagement. Rural students were found to do as well as nonrural, at risk as well as those not at risk. For further information, contact Dr. Michael Benz, Associate Professor, University of Oregon, 175 College of Education, 5260 University of Oregon, Eugene, OR 97403-5260 ★ (541) 346-1408.

The Milwaukee Public School System contracted with **SRI International of Menlo Park, California**, to conduct an evaluation of its school-to-work initiative. SRI worked in partnership with the school-to-work leadership throughout the 1994-95 school year, providing regular formative feedback, assisting with design and implementation issues. The evaluators surveyed students and teachers, examined documents, and conducted case studies. In August 1995, SRI released the first phase of the evaluation, documenting the early stages of the design and implementation in the ten participating schools. In this initial process evaluation, SRI found several areas of strength and progress in the Milwaukee school-to-work system, including capacity building and professional development of teachers, its emphasis on academic rigor and equity, a flexible and flat organizational hierarchy, and the role of liaison between educators and employers. While the evaluation is currently looking at the process of developing a school-to-work district initiative, SRI will provide input for a long-term evaluation of the school-to-work system, focusing on student outcomes. For further information, contact School to Work, Milwaukee Public Schools, P.O. Box 2181, Milwaukee, WI 53201-2181 ★ (414) 475-8004.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THIS TOPIC, CONSULT THE FOLLOWING PUBLICATIONS AND ORGANIZATIONS:

Publications

Fetterman, D. M., Kaftarian, S. J., and A. Wandersman. *Empowerment Evaluation: Knowledge and Tools for Self-Assessment and Accountability*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1995.

Fink, A. *Evaluation for Education and Psychology*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1995.

King, J. A., Morris, L. L., and C. T. Fitz-Gibbons. *How to Assess Program Implementation.* Center for the Study of Evaluation, UCLA. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1987.

Kreuger, R. *Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1988.

Littel, J. H. *Building Strong Foundations*. Chicago: The Family Resource Coalition, 1986.

Orr, M. T. *Evaluating School-to-Work Transition.* Washington, DC: Academy for Educational Development, 1995.

Rossi, P. H., and H. E. Freeman. *Evaluation: A Systematic Approach.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1993.

Shipman, S. "General Criteria for Evaluating Social Programs." *Evaluation Practice* 10:1 (February 1989).

U.S. General Accounting Office. *Case Study Evaluations*. Washington, DC: U.S. General Accounting Office/Program Evaluation and Methodology Division, 1987.

Worthen, B. R., and J. R. Sanders. *Educational Evaluation: Alternative Approaches and Practical Guidelines*. White Plains, NY: Longman Publishers, 1987.

Organizations

The mission of the **Center for Human Resources (CHR)** at Brandeis University is to improve the quality of employment preparation and education services by combining knowledge gained from scholarly research and practical experience in ways that help policy makers successfully address the issues of long-term self-sufficiency for youth and young adults. CHR has assisted thousands of policy makers and practitioners to create community-wide strategies linking education reform, workforce preparation, and economic development. 60 Turner Street, Waltham, MA 02154 ★ (617) 736-3770 ★ hn4032@handsnet.org.

The **Center on Education and Work** at the University of Wisconsin is a research, development, and technical assistance unit of the university's school of education whose mission is to improve the linkage between education and work to ensure that all citizens engage in meaningful and productive careers. The Center develops new knowledge through research, designs and evaluates innovations, and translates research and development findings into practical solutions and effective policies through capacity-building technical assistance and

dissemination. 964 Educational Sciences, 1025 West Johnson, Madison, WI 53706 ★ (608) 263-3696 ★ aphelps@mail.soemadison.wisc.edu.

The **Education Development Center, Inc. (EDC)** is an international nonprofit research and development organization whose projects span the globe, joining research with practice to meet challenges in education, health, technology, human rights, and the environment. EDC's National School-to-Career Consortium is a collaborative of twenty-one education, industry, labor, research, state government, postsecondary education, and community-based organizations established to provide technical assistance to school-to-work programs and systems. 55 Chapel Street, Newton, MA 02158-1060 ★ (617) 969-7100 ★ joycem@edc.org.

The mission of the **Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development (FWL)** is to challenge and enable educational organizations and their communities to create and sustain improved learning and development opportunities for their children, youth, and adults. FWL conducts research--including evaluation, develops products and programs, provides assistance to education agencies at all levels, communicates the results of research and exemplary practice, and explores linkages among other agencies and institutions. 730 Harrison Street, San Francisco, CA 94107-1226 ★ (415) 565-3000 ★ sananda@fwl.org.

The Institute on Education and the Economy (IEE) at Columbia University is a multi-disciplinary research and technical assistance center. IEE conducts research on the implications of changes in the economy and labor markets for all levels of education and training systems in the United States. The Institute also provides technical assistance and evaluation services to schools, school districts, and states involved in work-related education reform. Teachers College, Box 174, 525 West 120th Street, New York, NY 10027 ★ (212) 678-3091 ★ iee@columbia.edu.

KRA Corporation is a small business professional and technical services organization. Its research and development division focuses on the application of the social and behavioral sciences to support policy making, planning, service delivery and management, particularly in the area of youth programs. KRA's client divisions include research and evaluation, organizational consulting, information technology, and communications and management. 1010 Wayne Avenue, Suite 850, Silver Spring, MD 20910 ★ (301) 495-1591 ★ Infosys@KRA.com.

The mission of the **Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC)** is to develop and test the effectiveness of promising education, employment, and training programs designed to help economically disadvantaged populations become self-sufficient. MDRC's approach is to take promising program ideas, look for public agencies and community organizations willing to implement a program on a trial basis, provide technical assistance to help these organizations, evaluate the effectiveness of the program, and actively disseminate the results. 3 Park Avenue, 32nd Floor, New York, NY 10016-5936 ★ (212) 532-3200 ★ Ivry@MDRCny.mhs.compuserve.com.

MPR Associates Inc. is a consulting firm specializing in public sector management, planning, and research. MPR has conducted numerous projects involving education for work, curriculum development, professional development, evaluation, data systems, and program management in areas related to education and job training for federal, state, and local government agencies, as well as private sector clients. 2150 Shattuck Avenue, Suite 800, Berkeley, CA 94704 ★ (510) 849-4942 ★ mpr@netcom.com.

The National Center for Research in Vocational Education (NCRVE) conducts research and development in work-related education and plays an important role in developing new models of career-focused education reform. NCRVE has an ongoing partnership with teams of teachers, administrators, and counselors from thirty schools in twenty-six major cities. 2150 Shattuck Avenue, Suite 1250, Berkeley, CA 94720-1674 ★ 800-762-4093, 510-642-4004 ★ slf@uclink4.berkeley.edu.

The National Center on the Educational Quality of the Workforce is a national research and development center concerned with workforce and education issues, which examines the interaction of employers, schools, students/workers, and public policy to determine how better connections among these stakeholders would improve the educational quality of the workforce and bolster the nation's competitiveness in a global economy. University of Pennsylvania, 4200 Pine Street, 5A, Philadelphia, PA 19104-4090 ★ (215) 898-4585 ★ eqw-requests@irhe.upenn.edu.

Public/Private Ventures (P/PV) is a national nonprofit organization whose mission is to help improve the policies, organizational practices, and initiatives undertaken by the private and public sectors to help young people, especially those from poor communities, increase their capacities to lead productive lives. P/PV designs, tests, and studies initiatives that increase support and access to opportunity for teenagers in low-income communities, and provides training and technical assistance to practitioners and programs in the youth field. One Commerce Square, 2005 Market Street, Suite 900, Philadelphia, PA 19103 ★ (215) 557-4400 ★ PPVYouth@aol.com.

The **Urban Institute** is a nonprofit policy research, evaluation, and technical assistance organization whose goal is to produce superior quality analysis and technical assistance to achieve sustainable and significant improvements in social and economic outcomes. Its expertise includes monitoring and evaluation systems, community needs assessment, local labor market analysis, development of performance standards, staff training, and assessment of program delivery mechanisms. 2100 M Street, NW, Washington, DC 20037-1264 ★ (202) 857-8676 ★ blerman@ui.urban.org.

For more information about STW Resource Bulletins, please contact:

The National School-to-Work Learning and Information Center

400 Virginia Avenue, SW, Room 210 / Washington, D.C. 20024

1-800-251-7236 / Fax: 202-401-6211

E-mail: stw-lc@ed.gov

Internet: http://www.stw.ed.gov

FACT SHEET

SCHOOL TO WORK OPPORTUNITIES

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION ★ U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

BUILDING A COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM, NOT A CATEGORICAL PROGRAM

The School to Work Opportunities Act passed Congress with strong bipartisan support and was enacted in May 1994. Across the nation, thanks in part to the leadership and coherence provided by the legislation, local communities have created programs, and states have passed legislation to knit programs into systems.

The School to Work Opportunities Act is administered by the National School-to-Work Office under the joint direction of the U.S. Departments of Labor and Education. The Act encourages educational and career opportunities for *all* students by creating a framework for business and educational partnerships at the state and local levels. These partnerships help students make the vital connection between what they learn in school and in the workplace and prepare them for good careers and advanced education and training.

Venture Capital Funding

The school-to-work initiative puts in place a clear, comprehensive framework and provides venture capital for states and local partnerships to design systems that help young people make the transition from school to careers and lifelong learning. The initiative does not establish a new program to add to the myriad of existing education and training programs. Rather, it puts in place the infrastructure for a national system that's based on existing models and efforts, such as career academies, youth apprenticeship, Tech Prep, and cooperative education.

In 2001, the legislation sunsets, and school-to-work systems will be institutionalized at the state and local levels. Federal support includes:

DEVELOPMENT GRANTS. Planning grants were awarded to all 50 states, Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia to produce comprehensive plans for statewide systems. Seven U.S. territories have received development grants.

STATE IMPLEMENTATION GRANTS. School-to-work implementation funds are being rolled out in waves. Initially, eight states were awarded grants with the understanding that their efforts would, in part, inform and improve subsequent efforts. In order to be approved, these statewide plans for school-to-work systems had to:

- Provide local funding to sustain the school-to-careers system after federal funds sunset;
- Coordinate activities from related federal education and training programs, such as the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Education Act; the Elementary and Secondary Education Act; the Job Training Partnership Act; the Family Support Act; the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act; and the Adult Education Act;
- Stimulate and support school-to-work programs to meet the requirements of the proposal and expand the program throughout the state;